

# PROVIDING PERSONAL SUPPORT IN UNCERTAIN TIMES – ACHIEVING ROI

The government's 'prioritise and economise' message of September this year suggests that a significant number of NHS jobs are likely to come under scrutiny in the near future. Clayton Glen, Director at HDA, a UK-based career and talent management consultancy, discusses what the future is likely to bring to NHS workers and how healthcare organisations can best support their staff through the difficult times ahead.

**D**iagnosis. The NHS offers over 300 different careers all ultimately dedicated to patient care and treatment. That translates to an incredibly complex task addressing personal career aspirations at an organisational level. The task is complex enough during times of rapid growth (which the NHS has done over recent years), but becomes more complex during times of uncertainty; particularly as the 300 careers catered for by the NHS include skills and knowledge that are highly transferrable at one level, vs other skills and knowledge that are specific but not highly transferrable.

One in five Britons now already work for the state; with one in nineteen with the NHS, so, when in his April 2009 budget, the Chancellor conceded that the projected underperformance of the economy is so great that public spending will soon account for just under 50 per cent of national income, with public sector debt close to reaching £1,000billion; this provides a clear indicator that an increasing and significant number of NHS assets and jobs are likely to come under scrutiny over the coming months and years, with potential for large-scale job loss. The government's 'prioritise and economise' message at the TUC on 15 September provides a clear picture of what is likely to follow.

The career continuity diagnosis is not great for many categories of skilled and experienced staff across the NHS.

**Prognosis.** The implication for a cross section of UK healthcare workers is that the coming period is very likely to be characterised by the following:

1. Increased uncertainty about the future in general, as well as increased uncertainty about personal career growth opportunities as staff development and recruitment budgets are revised.
2. Increased fears, justified or not, about job security, and for many, the unfortunate loss of their jobs, requiring personal efforts towards:
  - Finding new roles, in some cases suboptimal opportunities given a tight employment market with 2.5 million unemployed at the time of writing, and for others, involving potential international shifts, eg. the large cadre of foreign NHS workers who may need to return home;
  - Entering self-employment, as consultants, interims, etc;
  - Starting up a business;
  - Re-skilling and re-training themselves to improve their marketability;
  - Keeping busy and doing something meaningful during a career hiatus.
3. Others will suffer the discomfort of 'surviving' the redundancies of colleagues and friends, and the ongoing uncertainty related to change
4. Managers will face the prospect of having to keep skilled teams engaged and dedicated.

**Treatment.** Over the coming months and years, many leaders from across the various NHS hospital, mental health, ambulance and primary care

trusts (PCTs), and strategic health trusts (SHAs) will be required to deliver the following 'treatments' to ensure that the organisation which emerges is one that emerges with its capability and reputation (employer brand) intact:

- Actively support/empower managers to deliver tough messages, to manage change, and to take care of themselves during a difficult period, while seeking to maintain morale and dedication
- Actively support/empower staff directly impacted by any redeployment or job cuts with realistic but creative career transition and outplacement support, (which may in future be in the context of reductions to redundancy pay conditions)
- Actively support/empower (ie. inform and motivate) the 'survivors' of restructuring, with a view to assuring an engaged workforce committed to the restructured organisation that emerges from the change process.

The treatments are not simple ones, and these obligations will in part be delivered using internal NHS resources, and in part via the engagement of professional change, career transition/outplacement and talent consultancies.

One treatment without the others will lead to an incomplete output and sub-optimal return on investment (ROI). As a world-class organisation, NHS leaders should expect that any external providers that they engage should demonstrate their ability to achieve all of the above, to maximise ROI.



To maximise ROI it is recommended that you ask your prospective supplier the following questions before you commission them:

#### Manager support by external providers:

- Do they demonstrate a measurable outcomes-focused approach?
- Is their approach aimed at imparting confidence and competence for managers to deliver tough messages under circumstances which may be personally distressing?
- Is their approach aimed at empowering managers to become effective change agents?
- Is their approach aimed at empowering managers to take care of themselves, including their health, their career development and their motivation during difficult times?

#### Redeployment/outplacement support by external providers:

- Do they demonstrate a clear, measurable outcomes-focused approach?
- Do they offer comprehensive individualised support to impacted staff at all levels and with broad needs vs taking a one-size-fits-all sausage-machine approach?
- Do they have the means to effectively

communicate the support on in such a way that it enhances the experience for those directly impacted, and the ease with which changes are implemented and accepted for those who stay with the organisation?

- Do they follow up their work with transparent end of programme/project measures of individual satisfaction and settlement rates?
- Do they take a realistic view of opportunities for re-settlement in a difficult market, vs creating unrealistic resettlement expectations?
- Do they provide access to vocational training within their outplacement programmes; acknowledging that more and more people are recognising the need to develop their skills and knowledge during periods of career transition?
- Do they offer to empower and train the organisation's HR team to become effective career advisors as part of the value add that they deliver?

#### Survivor support by external providers:

- Do they demonstrate a clear, measurable outcomes-focused approach?
- Do they help staff put change in context, and stress the point to indirectly impacted staff that

redundancy is not a new thing, it affects an increasing number of people at some point, and it is often a valuable career development step?

- Do they recognise that much is to be gained from engaging the survivors of change in honest career leverage conversations and to develop conscious personal career ownership, by providing in-house careers centres?

Return on investment (ROI) and 'value for money' are key considerations in selecting an external provider, measured in terms of the ease with which changes are implemented and accepted, and how the provision of this support for managers, directly impacted staff and the survivors of restructuring, enhances the organisation's reputation in the wider community. ■

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